

Violent Intentions, Ch 4-6

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Summary: Spider-Man continues his hunt for the killer... but what he finds isn't what he suspected.

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CHAPTER FOUR

"Okay, I want to know why the public has been denied information about this rash of murders over the past four days. And more than that, I want the public to know why."

J. Jonah Jameson was railing at the staff and freelancers of the Daily Bugle, "New York's Finest Daily Newspaper". Jameson had a strong belief in right and wrong, and an intrinsic sense of heroism, but that didn't prevent him from going off like a Southern Baptist preacher when something made him angry.

"Now, someone, I don't give a damn who, get out there and find out what's going on!" The only person who didn't volunteer was Peter Parker.

Peter shuffled home, depressedly. Mary Jane was starting to really wonder why this was bothering him so much, because he had said that he wasn't taking any pictures of the incident since two days ago. He wasn't lying, but he was when he told her he wasn't going out as Spider-Man to try and solve this case. He really didn't even have much of a choice but to make do until the killer had completed his own name through the sigils. But that also meant going out every day to copy down the patterns left at every new death.

Pete felt so helpless. He couldn't find this killer, but he was no detective. Ever since his Uncle Ben died, Peter had been using his gifts to defend innocent people. Now, he could do nothing but sit by and watch as people died. He wanted to scream. However, he was more of the sulking type.

He had two more houses to go to, for the purpose of copying horrid

scrawlings on walls and floors, and he had to stop by Doctor Strange's Greenwich Village manor.

If he didn't kill himself from the sheer horror first.

Larry Grist gulped the coffee down as fast as he could. Tiffany Belmont had never seen him this emotionally drained.

"Rough night?" she asked, trying to be light hearted. It wasn't working.

"Haven't slept since that second body showed up." She could tell they were thinking the same thing: why couldn't this have just been Carnage or someone? She hadn't been getting the best of sleep either. And Spider-Man hadn't shown up since that second body appeared. She wondered if he was trying to help, or if he was the killer.

That thought hit her in the face like a steel pipe. Could he have... was he just....? She shrugged the thought off. Even though he was a master of espionage with his agility and wall-crawling, when he was accused and later cleared of murder before, it had more finesse.

Then it hit her again. He was cleared of murder before, cleared being the operative word. So why couldn't he be suspect this time?

OK, smartass, why did he want copies of the sigils? Why didn't he know about the second body? Both he and the press knew about the first body, but neither of them had heard about the second. And hadn't Spider-Man been connected with some photographer kid before?

She couldn't argue with this internal voice. And besides, wasn't there supposed to be a new Spider-Man out there? Since his short disappearance, one of the theories was that the original had been killed and replaced with a new one. A little farfetched, but maybe enough to put the wall-crawler out of consideration as a suspect.

But then again, she hadn't been sleeping either, so she wasn't thinking clearly at all. And at that point, Tiffany realized that neither her nor her partner had said a word for five minutes.

Doctor Strange saw something horrible.

After Spider-Man dropped off the new sigils for him (the killer's name was Marc S-C-something), Doctor Strange tried to use a psionic projection with the Eye of Agamotto to find the killer's mind and explore it. Perhaps he could find out his identity and his motive and his method by exploring his thoughts.

At first, all he could feel was an onslaught of confusion and uncertainty (was this the murderer's emotions?), and just the hint of a name through that cloud. Then, suddenly, something like a hand, a physical hand that had substance on the astral plane, yanked him out of the criminal's mind and put it in another one. A mind that could be described as nothing short of hell.

Glimpses of a man, obviously Jesus, turning his face skyward, asking

for sympathy from his God, as he hung, ruined on a cross. Strange could feel another man's sympathy and sorrow for this good man, who died for no other reason than speaking his mind.

Another memory, another time. Russia. Pulling himself along a snowbank. He had been shot four times. In the back. After being poisoned. All that had weakened his physical form. Certainly wouldn't kill him. The bridge. Made it to the bridge. Royal family wouldn't have approved of this. Think I was responsible. Another shot in back. Won't kill me. Picking me up? They think to drown. Me. Can't do it. Immortal. Cold water. Lungs filling. Black. Must. Will. Self. To. Heal. Come back... some... other... day.

Another memory. {Clearly along for the ride in this mind, Doctor Strange thought, but how powerful can this other be? He's suppressing my wil... and then he is returned to the other person's thoughts) It was another ashen day above Auschwitz. He was there, examining how this malicious act is affecting the people trapped in hell. He could feel their pain by osmosis. Every ounce of it. But he was learning to much. The evil here was palpable. So he would continue to whisper those fantasies in Mengele's ear about Hitler's favor until the Allies knocked down the doors of Auschwitz. Then a face caught his eye. He was a white-haired lad of nine, maybe ten, growing up in horror of Nazi Germany behind pens for human cattle.

He looked this boy right in the eye. "You have great evil in you. You will one day make a fine experiment, boy. But not until your hidden powers expose themselves."

Then he felt the forceful grip of SS troops grab him. He heard Mengele's voice, "There's the bastard! The only reason he'd get that close was to overthrow me, I'm sure of it! Put him in the furnace!"

Time to feign death again.... always ends this way....

Another time, place, vivid, but still memory, another man's memory, no less. He felt the red-white hot brand enter the flesh of his chest. The pain filled his being, it engulfed him. He didn't think he could bear it. But when the Inquisitor barked a command in his native Spanish to confess his sins, Strange told them to turn the brand on themselves. Impudence would be punished with more torture, but Strange knew they couldn't kill him. His mortal body (still a necessity as a focus for his power) could be hurt, but all he had to do was will his body to gas, or his bones to rubber, or his nerves to iron. His power was virtually limitless. These dogmatic fools had no power.

Another memory. He stood on the gallows. The plantation owner was screaming at him. Not only had he run, he had crippled a guard. A sin punishable by death. The owner dropped his hand, the signal for the hangman. The crowd screamed with delight when the executioner nodded. Good ol' fashioned southern lynchin'.

The stool fell out from under him. He could have willed his neck to iron, or willed the rope to snap, but he needed to experience the pain. Needed to. Instead he bent reality so that he wouldn't die. His heart stopped, his breath froze, and although the pain was so great he wanted to scream, the rope was clenched tight around his larynx. He had to keep concentration. If he lost control for one second, it

would be as if he willed himself to mist and lost control; he would die instantly and his mission would be over. He had learned much, though.

And then, Strange was himself again. Floating in a limbo of sorts, he looked around, trying to get his bearings, and came face to face with a pair of glowing red eyes. He tried to look at the rest of his adversary, but his "eyes" were locked onto that other terrible pair.... that belonged to a soul that had experienced more pain than any man was ever meant to feel. And, with that, the mystery man kicked Strange out of his mind.

Doctor Strange, who had been floating in his library, fell to the floor when his mind was all-too-forcefully hurled back into his brain and body. His head hurt in ways that couldn't be described. And he had, in the course of... he looked at the wall clock... three minutes and thirteen seconds felt more pain than he had in the course of his life.

The Master of the Mystic Arts, unable to figure out what else to do, knelt down, and began sobbing.

Two years ago.

"Dear Lord. What is it?"

"I don't know. But I made it, and I control it."

"How can you do this? Are you a mutant...?"

"I don't think so. I've been reading up, and this would have shown up when I was born, or hit puberty."

"Then how....?"

"The accident?"

"Maybe."

Alicia Garrison and Marc Schwimmer were talking about the large, hulking creature in front of them. It looked like it was made out of dirt and rock, with an armor made out of a human skeleton. Marc had formed it out of pure force of will, apparently, a side effect of his surviving the fire three months ago. They were in a darkened alley, the only place where they could hide this eight foot monstrosity in New York.

"Wow. So you control this? Cool," Alicia remarked. "What can it do?"

"I haven't had time to practice with it, so I don't know what it can do. All I've figured is that it's probably pretty damn strong, and I can sort of teleport it by calling it back and summoning it again."

"So what, you gonna become a superhero now?" Alicia asked.

"I don't know. I haven't really thought about it all that much."

Alicia's response somewhat startled Marc. "Well, I don't want you to."

"Huh?"

"I know you have a good heart, and want to do good, but superheroing is dangerous. People die. Call me selfish, but you should at least wait for a few years until you can best control it."

"Okay. I won't."

She smiled her approval.

He returned the smile, then they hugged. She was cool with this. That was important. He didn't want her running in fear from him. He loved her. Truly. And he never wanted her to be scared of him.

And, half hidden by the shadows of the alley, the monster's image rippled, and vanished.

CHAPTER FIVE

Day six.

Peter had managed to convince Mary Jane, after hours of trying, that he was not risking his neck as Spider-Man anymore. She was starting to get suspicious as to why he was gone for Bugle assignments over the past few days, but not coming back with checks or money.

"How do you know I'm not?" he said.

She didn't have an answer.

He felt horrible, and because of that, he decided to walk and sulk to "work" today. He wanted to go to the Bugle, get an assignment, any assignment, and get pictures. It didn't matter how or why, but he didn't think he could stand looking at another eviscerated body or another crushed skull.

Y o u w o n ' t h a v e t o .

The message was in Doctor Strange's voice, and it echoed in Peter's mind. He could already tell what that meant. He had to go see the Doc immediately. Hopefully, this nightmare would be over soon.

"I looked through the phone books, and it turns out that there's only one 'Marc Schwimmer' in the New York City area," Steven Strange said. "At least, only one that seems to be capable of this. I checked all of the people who matched up with the name 'Marc S-C-H-W'. The only one with superhuman power is a Marc Schwimmer in Manhattan. I couldn't determine what his power was, because there's a force that's interfering whenever I try to find out anything about him. All I could garner was his address."

"Great," Spider-Man said. "Except for one problem: I try and go in there and stomp the crap outta this guy. How are we gonna get him in prison? There isn't a lot of evidence, except for his name written in a language that was dead before Bob Dole was young. Unless we get this guy to confess, he's never even going to get to a trial."

Doctor Strange walked out into light from the large window in his ceiling. "I will disguise myself a scholar versed in ancient languages. I will testify on the prosecution's behalf."

"Ummmmmm.... that's illegal, Doc. So I guess that's what you'd call malpractice," Spider-Man said, jumping to the wall and crouching there.

"Do you have a better idea?" Spidey couldn't think of one. "However, the problem is is that there is a force guarding him. It's incredibly powerful, capable of shutting out my magics. Perhaps that is what his power is, but none the less, it knows who I am. I will be unable to help you on your quest."

"But, um, you've got incredible magical abilities. Who could've put the smackdown on you, except maybe that freaky Timmy kid from the Life cereal commercials? Creepy little bastard."

"I don't know. But be careful."

"I have a name and address," Spider-Man said as he crawled into the detectives' window.

Larry hesitated for a minute, then asked Tiffany, "Invitation or no?"

"Ummm... uninvited, but not unwelcome."

"I didn't think you'd show up again, Spidey," Tiffany said, turning her attention to the adventurer. "It's been days since you said you wanted to help, and I never heard from you again."

"Sorry. They had an Earth 2 marathon on the Sci-Fi channel," Spidey quipped, crawling across the wall.

"So.... Spider-Man," Larry said uneasily, "what did you find out?"

"Well, the sigils are the language of an ancient race of demons, and they spell out the killer's name. I know, this makes less sense a Gravity Kills song's lyrics."

"So the killer wanted to be found?" Larry asked. He didn't pause at the demonic reference; he'd imagined Spider-Man would find something like this since Tiffany mentioned the crime-fighter offered help.

"I guess, although I can't fathom why."

"Alright, I'll call out a squad to knock this guy's door in within the hour," Tiffany said.

"Yeah, let's," confirmed Larry. He didn't sound so drained now that there was a suspect. Someone he could pin it on. Tiffany, on the other hand, seemed still horribly depressed.

"Can you guys get an arrest warrant?" Spider-Man asked the cops.

"Yeah. The judge has the whole thing filled out. If we have probable

cause, he'll give it to us, no problem," Tiffany said.

"I think his name spelled out in blood is 'probable'," Spidey said. "I'll be inside the apartment in one hour. I hope you'll be their to back me up."

Nine days ago.

"Come on, Alicia. I grew up on that cartoon. They ass-raped it so bad, it's barely worth mentioning!" Marc protested.

"M, it's a movie. A Disney movie at that. How good did you expect it to be?" Alicia countered moving closer to him as they walked down the street.

"They showed the bad guy's face. You don't do that," Marc whined.

"Oh, big bad superhero is turned into a big bad pile of mush after going to a kiddie movie. Heck, you wanted to g--" Alicia said, interrupted as a man in a ratty trench coat shoved the couple into an alley they were passing. There was almost no light in there, just barely enough to see.

"Superhero, huh?" the mugger asked. "Had a couple o' bad run-ins with them. Didn't much like it." The mugger yanked out a magnum revolver and pressed it against Alicia's face. "Now, any money you have, give it. Or the chick becomes a science project."

"Okay, okay, just be cool, dude...", Marc started to say. He started reaching for his wallet, but behind the mugger, an eight foot creature that looked like it was made of dirt appeared out of nowhere. Nowhere at all.

"Hurry it up, punk. I'm on a clock," the burglar said, a moment before the hulking beast wrapped its arm around the crook. The beast pulled the man into the air in a crushing bear-hug.

"Oh, thank you, Marc! That was so clo--"

The bullet rang out. Apparently, the scumbag wasn't the kind of guy to not carry out his word. The bullet entered Alicia's stomach. She crumpled to the ground when the impact hit. She let out a muffled cry that was more shock than pain.

"Alliiicccciaaaa!!!!"

With a thought from Marc, the huge monster that he controlled flung the mugger across the length of the alley. He would wake up the next day, with his entire shoulder shattered; it would be years before his gun arm healed.

Marc knelt over his girlfriend. She was mumbling, "Marc.... hurts.... help me.... I.... love y.... you...." Marc, confused and not thinking clearly, screamed, "No, godammit, don't give your goodbyes yet!"

"Man.... some.... date.... bad movie... on top of.... this...." she said, trying her best to smile through the pain.

"No. 'This' is nothing. I can save you," he said, voice filled with as much conviction as he could muster.

The beast moved from its hiding place in the shadows and picked up the lovers with the tenderness of a child. Some months ago, Marc found that he could experience the world through the monster's eyes, ears, and "skin". He was doing this now, to make sure that neither of them would be hurt.

The beast climbed to the rooftops and sprinted over New York's skyline to the nearest hospital.

Her body was breathing steadily, and the bullet had been removed, but she still held on by a precarious thread. She was in a coma, laying on the hospital bed, perfectly still.

Marc was there. He was holding her hand to his face. His face was pulled into a grimace as he cried. He would do anything to get her back. Anything.

"Anything?" a voice said from behind him. It was a deep, resonating voice. It sounded like the voice of Satan.

Marc turned to look at who was talking to him. And for a minute, he actually believed he was Satan. The man was dressed in a long, dark, floor length coat, and a black fedora. A shadow fell over his glowing red eyes. He had bone-white hair and a moustache that went down to his jawline.

"No, I'm not Satan. Call me a... doctor, of sorts," the man said. Marc could tell he was inside his head. "Did you really mean that you would do anything to have Alicia Garrison back?"

"Uuuuhhhhhh...." was all Marc could manage.

"Don't worry. I don't want your soul. I couldn't give a damn about your soul. I'd rather you used your unique talents to help me. If I heal her."

After a several minute pause, Marc softly said "Alright."

The stranger touched Alicia on the stomach. Suddenly her vital signs kicked to life and her eyes opened.

CHAPTER SIX

"Mmmaaaaaarrrrrccccc!!! It's about time you tell me what's going on here!" Alicia yelled as she approached his apartment. She'd had enough of his lying and roundabout answers. Something wasn't right, and, god damn it, she wanted to know what it was.

She slid her key into the lock, turned it, and threw open the door. Marc was sitting on the floor, his back to her. He didn't have a shirt on, and his head was hunched down, like he was crying. It hadn't looked like he'd bathed in days.

"Marc, for God's sake, will you tell me why you haven't been returning my calls, why you've been avoiding--"

She stopped when he turned to look at her. He looked about ready to

cry. There were dark purple rings under his eyes, and his forehead was creased with his eyebrows up, like he was asking for mercy.

"He's been making me.... do... horrible things, Alicia. But I did it for you. He didn't give me a choice. It's killing me. Please.... help me.... again," Marc pleaded.

"What are you talking about?"

"Ever wonder how we both healed so fast from our mortal injuries? My injury gave me a gift. Someone else gave you a gift, to heal from your injury. But... the cost was so, so high. No God would ever give me His forgiveness, now..." he whimpered.

Alicia noticed that the mirror on the apartment wall was starting to press out. Her attention was drawn to it exclusively, and Marc simply said, "He's here."

The area pressing the mirror out looked like a man trying to press through Saran Wrap, only the mirror's stretched surface became as runny as fresh syrup. The reflective "glass" poured off of the shape of the man in thick droplets. Finally the mirror pulled itself back to it's original shape. A tall man in a long brown coat, a dark cape, black tights for pants, a loose, white shirt, tall boots, and long, white hair stood before them.

"It's time again, Marcus Jacob Schwimmer," Judas Traveller said. "And I see you have a guest."

Spider-Man was hanging from the ceiling in front of Marc Schwimmer's door. He was just about to fling himself through it when his spider-sense flared up like a lightning strike in his head.

What the hell was that?, Spider-Man thought. Well, I might as well go in and find out!

He swung his legs back, threw them forward again, and crashed through the front door. He landed at the feet of Judas Traveller.

"Have to give you credit, Jude," Spidey said nervously, "you're the only guy on the planet who can make effeminite jewelry threatening." Spidey did his best to hide the fact he was scared he wanted to wet himself.

He remembered Ravencroft Institute for the Criminally Insane, an insane asylum designed specifically for treating psychotic supervillains. Judas Traveller, a well-respected psychologist, but in reality something that blurred the line between hero and villain, came as a guest... and telepathically opened up the patients' minds like sardine cans. He found one thread that linked many of the villains: Spider-Man. He forced a psychologically fragile Spider-Man through a gamut where he was forced to look some of his most insane adversaries in the face. The attempt was to drive the crime-fighter insane.

Then the Traveller warped himself and Spider-Man one day into the future to show him a ruined, crushed New York, something Spider-Man, according to the godlike Traveller, allowed to happen. Spider-Man tried to stop it, but in the course of it all, Traveller was very

nearly pulled into a temporal void by the backwash of his timeshift, the effect that actually would have destroyed New York. Spider-Man was forced to endure the unimaginable anguish of the pain that the Traveller had felt throughout his life in order to save him.

But the Traveller was not quite done with Peter Parker yet. Intrigued that a man who Traveller put through Hell would still save his life, Traveller put Spider-Man on trial. With his enemies at Ravencroft as prosecution and jury.

Spider-Man had thought that the seemingly omnipotent Traveller was done with him, but in fact, it was Traveller, the man who put men's souls on dissecting tables and who could level armies with a wave of his hand, who needed his help.

A member of his Host explained to him that his power was mutant in nature, and that his only real power was to cast illusions, coupled with minor telepathy. The other members of the Host had betrayed him, and who Traveller thought was his best friend, Scrier, was actually a cadre of European criminals that once worshipped a deity called Scrier.

"Come on, Traveller, you know you can't hurt me. All you can do is alter my perceptions of reali--"

"Does this feel like an illusion?" Traveller asked simply. He snapped his fingers, and the hardwood floor beneath became a granite arm that pinned the hero to the ceiling with a clawed hand. He hadn't seen that coming at all. This had to be an illusion. Traveller couldn't suppress his spider-sense, could he?

"What Chakra told you is what she believed true, Spider-Man. But I had long suspected that my Host bent their knees to other masters, so I fed them misinformation about my abilities, so that they would underestimate me if they felt like betraying me."

Spidey closed his eyes. In the past, he could use his spider-sense as a radar to work through illusions. But the claw still held him.

The Traveller's eyes glowed an unearthly shade of red as he glared at Marc and Alicia. Alicia was terrified, on the verge of tears; Marc looked horribly defeated.

"It is time, once again, to summon that beast, Marc. It is time to kill."

Alicia looked at the pathetic form of Marc, slumped on the floor, in disbelief.

"Do not look so shocked, Alicia. I saved your life. He agreed to it. But I wanted to see how long he could put up with this horrible act. My studies into the nature of Evil itself are worth any cost in human life. But how much human life was yours worth to him?"

Spider-Man struggled to slip out of the hand, but couldn't slip himself free.

"What are you talking about, psyc... um..."

"If he ever stopped killing, I would give you back your injury... and

you would die."

There was the sound of crumbling rock as Spider-Man rammed his fingers into the claw's wrist and tore the arm apart. Judas whirled around, pointed at Spidey. Spidey's leaping at the white-haired man was the only thing that kept him from being crushed by a spiked, steel column that appeared out of nowhere before crashing through the roof.

"Traveller, all this talking could probably bore my old high school physics teacher into a snore," Spider-Man cracked as he hit Traveller. Traveller didn't react to the punch at all, but grabbed the web-slinger by the nape of the neck.

"Don't you know you can't stop me?"

"He's right... but I can," Marc said. He stood up. "I can stop this. I won't kill any more innocents, and I won't let Alicia die."

The beast appeared in front of him. It raised its arms above its head, prepared to crush the young man with a single blow.

"Alicia. I love you."

Judas Traveller snapped his fingers. The creature disappeared. The apartment returned how it looked before it was ruined. "And that is what I was waiting for. I wanted to see how long you would put up with this before you took action against me. I told you to write those sigils on the walls so that you would be found, so that you would have to make a decision sooner. I'm glad you finally came to your senses, boy."

Spider-Man was still struggling to break free of Judas' grip when a SWAT Team member kicked in the front door, and Tiffany Belmont and Larry Grist shot five slugs into the Traveller.

"What in the world?" Tiffany asked when the tall man in the cape didn't fall. Instead, blood gushed out of the wounds, staining his clothes. The blood ran up his face and completely covered his body, except for the cape. Then his body fell in a splash of blood and the cape covered it.

"What in hell just happened?" Larry asked.

"That was the guy behind this whole mess. He isn't dead, but I don't think he'll bother us again for a while."

Spider-Man pulled the cape away. On the floor, written in blood, was this message:

THEY WERE ALL GOING TO COMMIT SUICIDE, ANYWAY

"Man, and he didn't even stay to clean up the mess," Spider-Man said. Underneath his uncaring demeanor, all he wanted to do was lay down and cry.

Peter Parker would miss a vacation with his wife the next day. He wouldn't have time to reflect on what had just happened, because he missed the vacation thanks to a vampire infestation.

Tiffany Belmont would soon transfer out of homicide. She kept in close contact with her friend, Larry Grist, who remained in homicide.

Judas Traveller's whereabouts would remain unknown for some time.

And Marc and Alicia left New York a week later. They settled down in Montana, as far away from supervillains as they could get.

As far away from their violent intentions as possible.

End

End
file.